

CHAPTER IV
INTERPRETATION

The results presented in the last chapter can be discussed in two different ways: they can be merely used to form a simple description of child rearing practices among middle class Thai mothers or they can be compared to the child rearing practices of mothers (middle class as well as in general) in other cultures. Following the first method of discussion would lead to little more than a conclusion of the last chapter; following the second method would enable us to gain deeper insight into the child rearing practices of Thai middle class mothers plus enable us to describe the general picture of their child rearing practices. We chose this second method for discussing the data presented in this thesis. As the United States is a culture in which a great deal of research has been done on the training of children, it would seem to serve as a good comparison for the child rearing practices of Thai middle class mothers. Also, since some research has been done on the child training of Brazilian mothers, it also can serve as a comparison for Thai mothers. In both these cases, we will be dealing with middle class mothers. We assume that if there are differences in the responses of mothers of different cultures to the same or similar questions that these differences are the result of certain background factors in the two cultures.

Looking at the results of achievement and independence training in Brazil, the United States, and Thailand, we see some interesting differences.

	Brazil		U.S.		Thailand
	Class	Class	Class	Class	Middle Class.
	II	III	II	III	
Achievement Training	6.9	8.2	6.3	7.9	8.0
Independence Training	6.1	8.5	6.4	7.7	11.3

The Thai mothers represent what would seem to be a combination of class II and class III. As Rosen in his study did not give totals for each class we have no way of correctly finding a mean for middle class mothers in Brazil and the U.S. If, however, we take the liberty to assume that class II and III in Brazil and the United States sample each have equal totals, we see that achievement training in the middle class (class II and III) of Brazil occurs at a mean age of 7.6 years and in the United States at a mean age of 7.1 years. Remembering that this may not be an accurate figure because the totals may not be equal, Thai middle class mothers seem to train their children for achievement at a slightly later age. Performing the same calculation for independence training, Brazilian mothers training their children at a mean age of 7.3 years and American mothers at a mean age of 7.1 years. In independence training we see a strong difference of about 4 years between Thai middle class mothers and middle class mothers of Brazil and the United States

As our sample deals with middle class mothers in general, it is assumed that class II and III together are similar to our sample Rosen (8, P. 618) divides social class into five categories - Class I - V with class I being the highest and five lowest. Class II and III are middle Class categories.

Rosen (8) states that the Brazilian mothers show a statistically significant later age for training their children in achievement and independence than do American mothers, and he attributes this to a greater amount of indulgence on the part of the Brazilian mothers in their treatment of their children. The question arises as to whether or not the strong difference in independence training between Thai middle class mothers and Brazilian and American middle class mothers can also be attributed to a greater amount of indulgence of the child on the part of Thai middle class mothers? Also is it possible that the slight difference in achievement training can also be attributed in part to greater indulgence? It would seem to follow that if Thai middle class mothers were more indulgent in independence training and, to a lesser extent, in achievement training than mothers in Brazil and the United States, that this indulgence would be seen in other areas of child rearing practices; for example, in feeding, toilet training and punishment. As Sears Maccoby and Levin (9) have presented a rather detailed analysis of these areas for American mothers their study would seem to serve as a good comparison for the Thai mothers in our sample.

Sears et.al (9) report that on the whole American mothers do not breast feed their children, and even those who do breast feed only do so for an average length of time of about 3 months. On the other hand, Thai middle class mothers in all except 2 cases breast feed their children and do so for an average length of time of 8.79 months. As Sears et.al. report that there is no significant difference between middle class and working class mothers (9,P.427) regarding breast feeding in the American sample, they do not report separate results for middle class mothers. We, therefore, can say that Thai middle class mothers if we look at the regularity of feeding used by Thai and American mothers; about 51% of the American mothers used schedule feeding for their children while 46% of Thai middle class mothers used schedule feeding (54% fed the child when he desired it).

The indulgence of the child's desire in Thailand is even greater considering the fact that many Thai middle class mothers said they desired to feed by scheduled feeding but when actually came to feeding their children, they did so according to the desires of the child (Table 13)

The indulgence of Thai middle class mothers continues throughout the period of toilet training. The average time for beginning toilet training in Thailand is 9.2 months and the point at which the training ends according to the mothers is at 45.6 months. In the United States the age at the beginning of toilet training is about 11 months * while the mean age at the completion of training is 18 months. While the Thai mothers begin earlier than the American mothers, they take much longer to complete the training. These differences can be attributed to the vast differences between the methods of training in the two cultures.

Almost all Thai middle class mothers in the sample began training the child by holding and supporting the child in their arms over a pot **

* These means for the Sears et.al. data were computed from Table IV:1 on page 109. As they presented their figures in percentages it was necessary to first convert these into frequencies by multiplying them by the total number of mothers studied and dividing by 100. After this the mean age of each interval was multiplied by the subtotal within that interval; the means were computed from these figures.

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 ** This description of toilet training and following description of care taking in Thailand is, on the whole, from parts of the interview schedule not included in table form in this thesis.

which is not necessarily in the bathroom. They encouraged the child's movement of his bowels by a special sound or word. When the child's muscles developed so that he was able to sit on his legs (nang kathon) by himself the mother or nursemaid* let him do it by himself. After this the mother or nursemaid washed him. The reason for the length of time of toilet training being so long (about 36 months) is that mothers wanted the child to be able to clean himself. In the American sample, the main criteria used by mothers seems to be that no accidents took place (9, P.109); i.e. the child was able to control himself.

An important point that should be raised here is the nature of toilet training and the relationship between the child and the mother or nursemaid. One of the reasons for the child's difficulty during this period is a fear of loss of his mother's support: the child is afraid that his mother may not love him or may not be concerned with him. The Thai middle class mother has two factors which modify this difficulty for the child; the first is their desire for her child to be clean and her recognition that the child cannot clean himself. She must be present when he is finished, therefore the physical withdrawal of the mother occurs rather late. Secondly the presence of a caretaker like a ^{who} grandmother or nursemaid tends to be completely indulgent, attempting to satisfy every desire of the child. The combination of the above two factors seems to give the child a great deal of support.

* The Thai word for nursemaid is philiang. This person has as her only responsibility the care of the child.

The American middle class mother, on the other hand, most often does not have a nursemaid or a grandmother, to help her. Also, the completion of toilet training is based on control rather than on the child being able to wash or clean himself afterwards.

The role of the nursemaid and/or the grandmother in Thai middle class child rearing practices is quite great and contributes substantially to the indulgent child rearing practices. (Table 176)

As was seen in Table 17 a, most mothers state that other help them take care of the child almost every day and the individual, who are most important in helping them are the nursemaid and grandmother. Many mothers said that the reason they needed the help of others is that they worked, or did not know how to bring up the child (especially the first child) or that they desired the help of a nursemaid. This is a rather accepted way of bringing up children in the Thai middle class family.

In a Thai middle class household, the grandmother is the most respected member. As it is a tradition that the married couple usually lives with the wife's parents, most often it is the child's maternal grandmother who helps the mother take care of him. The importance of this is emphasized in the obedience which a child, especially a girl, must give to her parents and the general expectation that the child remains a child even after she becomes a mother. Therefore, the grandmother's influence on the grandchild is very great, especially the mother's first child.



The type of influence that grandmothers traditionally have is of a very indulgent nature. Thai middle class grandmothers try to give the grandchild every thing that he wants; if the child is unable to get something from his mother or father it is not uncommon for him to go to his grandmother who will provide him with what he wants. This, in the modern middle class home, can cause conflict with the educated middle class father and, to a lesser extent, mother.

While only 27% of the families now have grandparents living in the same house with them, many more had grandmothers living with them or - spending most of their waking hours with them when the children were young. Also, in a number of families, the grandmother died only a few years ago, but did play an important role in bringing up the child when he was young (especially the particular child under study).

In terms of bringing up the child, the nursemaid plays a similar role to the grandmother; except, of course, in the area of making important - decisions related to the child, and in punishing the child (Table 17b). The nursemaid is a servant hired by the parents with only one main responsibility, to bring up the child, this often leads her to react to the child as if the child were her own son or daughter. She is responsible for bathing, dressing, entertaining, etc. the child and in doing this is expected to be, and is, extremely indulgent of the child's desires. Of course, she does not bring up the child by herself. The mother of the middle class child is almost always present. But, whenever the child bothers the mother, the nursemaid will take him away and play with him.

Sometimes the nursemaid plays an extremely important role in decisions related to the child's development due to the fact that she was also the nursemaid who help the grandmother in rearing the mother when the mother was a child. In such cases, the nursemaid is permitted to punish the child. In general, the nursemaid, if she is an older woman, will have higher status than the other servants in the household.

From this analysis, we see that one of the basic concepts of child rearing among Thai middle class mothers is to indulge their children. A child, because he is helpless, is to be given everything. In general, since the parents conception of the helplessness of the child seems to continue to fairly late, probably until the child is ready to go to school, This indulgence also - continues. This can be seen in the way in which the parents punish the child. In all but three actions of the child (Table 22), most mothers will use mainly mild psychological forms of punishment. This result, is reinforced by the finding that most mothers (60 %) will never or only rarely use the one form of punishment which is the opposite of indulging the child, that is, depriving the child of something he wants. This is quite different from the methods used by the American mothers as reported by Sears et.al. They report that "Deprivation was widely used by these mothers (9, P.337)*

* Sears et.al report that middle class mothers tended to be less strict than working class mothers and working class mothers used deprivation and physical punishment more than middle class mothers. No specific percentages are given for the differences between the classes, therefore the reader must be warned that we are here comparing Thai middle class mothers with middle and working class American mothers.

Of the 40% who do use this form of punishment, the largest number (15.71% of the total) use it for obstinacy towards the parents and the second largest (10%) use it for not taking an interest in learning.

Beating is used more often than deprivation by Thai mothers but still not "often". While 34% (Table 23) of the Thai middle class mothers would never or only rarely use physical punishment, 52% of the American mothers would not use it. Because Sear et.al. report that middle class mother mothers use physical punishment less than working class mothers; this probably means that middle class mothers use physical punishment less than is indicated by the 52% figure. Therefore, it seems that Thai mothers have a tendency to use physical punishment more than deprivation as a method of punishment and tend to use physical punishment more than American middle class mothers.

However two important considerations must be kept in mind in terms of an analysis of indulgence in relation to the punishment of the child: first is the way in which the child perceives the punishment, secondly the action for which the child is punished.

When a Thai middle class mother punishes her child by beating him it must be taken into account that she is not the only member of the household who offers the child love. True, the child's feelings may be hurt, but the child has other people to go to for love; for example, he may go to his grandmother who will hold and fondle him even after his mother has hit him, or he may go and hide with the nursemaid who will comfort him. So, in reality, even though he is disturbed by his mother's punishment, he has other people to turn to for love. The child still is very much in an indulgent atmosphere.

even if he is hit. This is quite different from the practices of the ordinary American middle class mother who very often is the only individual who brings up the child. Therefore, when love is withdrawn by her through beating or through other means, it can be a very serious situation, especially if the father and mother work together in punishing the child. Also, to hit a child is not necessarily an act contrary to indulgence. A mother can hit a child in a moment of anger and a few moments later give the child whatever he wants; or again the nursemaid or grandmother can give him whatever he wants, even if he was hit a few minutes before. On the other hand, deprivation of something the child wants necessitates longer periods of time. In order to be effective, the mother must withdraw something from the child and not be willing to give it to him. The method is very difficult for the Thai middle class mother to perform because of her helpers and also because it is against her whole philosophy of child care.

A second very important point is that Thai middle class mothers physically punish their children for mainly one thing—doing something against the parents in the form of obstinacy (Table 24) or disobedience of the parents. One can also see that the main actions for which deprivation is used is when the child is obstinate with his parents (Table 22 & Table 24), disobeys them, steals or tells a lie. In short, mothers use these strong methods of punishment mainly when the child does something directly against his parents.

This leads to an interesting hypothesis: are Thai middle class mothers indulgent of their child in all situations except one—the child's relationship to his parents?

In Table 26s and 26v we see the reaction of the mother and father when asked whether or not the child should immediately obey them. The mothers stated that almost all the fathers (69%) and all of them feel that the child must immediately obey them; in the case of the mother, this is especially important when she personally wants something.

Obedience is required of all middle class children and the parents do not seem to desire to be indulgent of their desires in this one area. No doubt the obedience so often talked about in the classroom is, in part, a result of these child rearing practices.

If Thai middle class mothers rear their children in an indulgent manner except in the area of obedience to parents, a question arises as to whether or not this indulgence continues undisturbed until adolescence? Another question that is raised is what effect does the stress placed by parents on education and getting good grades have on the mother's indulgent treatment of the child?

We saw that while Thai middle class mothers train their children for independence at 11 years old, they train the child for achievement at only 8 years old. If we assume a strong connection between interest in the child's achievement and interest in his performance at school we would predict that mothers would begin to become less indulgent of the



become less indulgent of the child at about the time he goes to school or about 6-8 years old. This would be because the mother and father would begin to emphasize his doing well in school, which may necessitate forcing him to do homework and other school related activities even if he doesn't want to. Table 19 shows the accuracy of this prediction; mothers state that they begin to show less and less attention mainly between 6 years (74.29%) and 8 years old (71.42%). The reason given for this withdrawal is that at 6 years old the child is going to school (50%) or the child is growing up (24.29%); the reason at eight years old is that the child is growing up (50%) the child wants to do things by himself (14.28%) and the child is going to school (7.14%). While many mothers send their child to a nursery school (Kindergarten for 2-3 hours a day) at 4 years old, only 18.6% listed going to school as a reason for holding and fondling the child less and less at thus age.

This finding is given greater support in Table 20 which shows that the mothers stop holding and fondling their child between the ages of 4-8 years. The reason that more than 2/3 of these mothers give for stopping between 4-8 years is that the child is grown up and goes to school.

We can say that while middle class mothers do indulge their children a great deal, their child rearing practices are fairly complex. It probably would be more accurate to say that the orientation of middle class mothers is one of indulging their child in every area except one,

before the child is of school age; the main exception being actions against the parents desires particularly disobedience, not telling the truth or stealing (which usually involves in small children, taking something from the house). However, once the child becomes of school age, the mother's (and father's) achievement desires for their child became very important. They want their child to be successful in life, to become rich and famous, if possible, and they know that this cannot be accomplished without forcing the child to achieve. One indication that the achievement desires do not change the indulgent attitude toward the child in other areas. Is seen in the independence training of the child. Achievement training takes place at 8 years old yet independence training does not take place until 11 years old. This is quite different from both American and Brazilian mothers who seem to perform both achievement and independence training within less than an eight months period. Thai middle class mothers show a difference of 3.3 years between independence and achievement training.

As was show in the introduction to this thesis, Rosen stated the difference between early child rearing practices and later desires on the part of the parents for the child to achieve cause difficulty for the children in achieving good grades in school work and causes them to daydream often about doing well. In this true of Thai middle class children in general? Is this true of the children of mother's in this sample? Such information must await future research.

A question also should be raised as to whether Thai mothers of other social classes also follow these same patterns. Rosen states that in Brazil there are differences between social classes in terms of independence and achievement training. Is this also true of Thailand? Sears, Maccoby, and Levin (9) state there are no significant differences between social classes in the mother's breast feeding of the child. Is this true of Thailand? What are the similarities and differences in the child rearing practices of middle and working (lower) class Thai mothers? Further research should be done to inquire into the similarities and differences of child rearing practices of Thai middle and working (lower) class mothers.